

## ABSTRACT

### EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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FACTORS AFFECTING ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL STUDENTS' SUCCESS  
RATE AS PERCEIVED BY ADMINISTRATORS, TEACHERS, AND  
ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL STUDENTS

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The purpose of this study was to examine factors affecting the success rate of alternative school students as perceived by administration, teachers, and students. A five-member panel of administrators, teachers, and experts in research design completed a pilot test of the Alternative School Administrator Survey and Alternative School Student Survey. The expert panelists rated items on the survey on a scale of 1-5 to determine what the survey intended to ascertain.

The researcher found that some variables were highly related and deemed to be multi-collinear. Eight items were listed on the survey (principal leadership skills, teacher expectations, curricular content, parental involvement, supportive services, student success factors, school expectations, and community involvement); however, five items were measured. The two items not measured were school expectations and community

involvement. The aforementioned items were two constructs that measured the same thing; therefore, they were not computed on Table 5 in Chapter V.

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I am grateful to God for enabling me to make an idea become true. I thank my immediate and extended family for being supportive when I became weary. Finally, I thank my grandmother, “Big Moma,” for showing me what tenacity is all about.

This dissertation is dedicated to my children Ajayi and Ayana Cummings. Set high goals and never lose sight of them.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, educators, community activists, and lawmakers have devoted enormous attention to improving public education in America. In 1983, a nationally publicized document, *A Nation at Risk*, delineated numerous academic shortcomings of schools across the country and insisted on immediate, comprehensive school reform (Chandler, Frieberg, Stenson, & Nelson, 2002). The creation of alternative education programs in the 80s and 90s and today was one way school systems sought to improve public education. It was believed that the development of alternative schools would ensure that at-risk students would be successful in graduating from high school. Hence, the nation's dropout rate would decrease thereby affording alternative school graduates an opportunity to make a decent living and become productive citizens in society (Verney, 2001).

One of the biggest misconceptions about alternative schools is that their major focus is to serve only students who are disruptive in the classroom. Current research and literature, however, paint a different picture of students enrolled in alternative schools. They are often unmotivated, emotionally disturbed, disabled, attention deficit disorder, hyperactivity disorder (HDHD) or underprivileged teenage parents. In today's society, to say that a student is receiving alternative education may require further clarification since the term itself has taken on new meanings. Morley (1991) defines alternative

education as a perspective not a procedure or a program. He purports that there are many ways to be educated as well as many types of environments and structure for this to take place. He further asserts that all children should have the opportunity to be educated in high school and that a variety of structures and environments should be provided so that students can realize their true potential. Raywid (1999) identified from over thirty years of research three underlying philosophies that encompassed Morley's definition.

- A true alternative education promotes the belief that all children can learn if they are placed in a learning environment that meets their needs.
- A true alternative discipline program provides behavior modification and works to change students so that they can return to the mainstream.
- Through counseling and therapeutic programs, students with positive attitudes can be successful.

Studies conducted by Morley (1991), Raywid (1999), and the Oklahoma Technical Assistance Center (1995) overwhelmingly support alternative education programs. These authors maintain that alternative education programs help to improve the academic and social development of students by improving attendance, drop out rates, post secondary participation, classroom behavior, and attitudes by developing a positive view towards school and education.

Research conducted by numerous scholars (Cox, 1999; Hamm, 1999; Lehr, 1999; Morley 1991; Raywid 1999) delineated several characteristics of successful alternative programs that can now be distinguished from the unsuccessful ones. The most widely reported characteristics of these programs include:

- There should be teachers who care. It is important for teachers to truly care for at-risk children to maintain high expectations for them, and to believe that they can make a significant contribution to their community.
- There should be choice and commitment on the part of both students and teachers.
- The program should be long term and meet the needs of the whole person
- Small program size is needed to provide individuality and positive interaction.
- There should be freedom from standard district operating policies.
- The program should be designed and operated by staff members who have the flexibility to make modifications whenever conditions warrant.
- A significant part of the school day should be shared with staff and students together.
- There should be a high level of control over the various features within its program.
- Teachers should take on roles as educators, mentors, counselors, and advisors.
- Counseling should be a core part of the school curriculum.
- A clear, fair, and consistent disciplinary policy should be in place.
- Students should have access to basic health and social services.

Conversely, unsuccessful programs are designed by administrators and staff without additional input from parents and students; they are punitive in nature; they have little or no counseling services; and the program itself is often the last option for students who

face being totally removed from the school system if they refuse to attend (Morley, 1991).

During this time of comprehensive school reform, educators find themselves searching for innovative ways of meeting the need of at-risk alternative students. This study will assist educators in finding practical solutions that can be used with difficult students in alternative programs. Moreover, this research project will help planners and practitioners in developing a perspective as they establish alternative programs for the future.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine factors affecting the success rate of alternative school students as perceived by administration, teachers, and students. Attention is accorded the following components: principal leadership skills, school expectations, curricula content, teacher commitment, parental involvement, community involvement, student commitment, and counseling social services.

#### Background to the Problem

Recent data from the Georgia Department of Education (2000) reveal that the state currently has one of the highest dropout rates in the nation. There is a population of students who are not successful in a traditional school setting. Too many students are removed from a traditional curriculum; therefore, they act out in a non-conforming manner. Because of their non-conforming behavior, they are placed in an alternative school. This problem is generally ongoing for the individual if he/she does attend an

alternative school that is productive and designed to rehabilitate students back into the mainstream of schools. One of the goals of an alternative program is to lessen the dropout rate by giving the students an opportunity to attend a school that is conducive to their needs. As a result, students are more inclined to attend school on a regular basis.

The wave of alternative schools hit the public in the early eighties and progressed. Numerous models of alternative education programs/schools developed rapidly in order to accommodate the population of students who are not being productive in a traditional school. Although there are stigmas and barriers that come with the enrolling in an alternative school, the benefits outweigh the negative labels by far.

#### Statement of the Problem

Each year school systems throughout the country spend millions of dollars trying to find ways to educate students who do not benefit from traditional schooling. The high school dropout rate is so alarming that the situation is now being addressed through state and national political campaigns (Hall, 2000). Additionally, The National Association of State Boards of Education (Georgia Department of Education, 2000) estimates that 15-30% of the current high school population will drop out before reaching the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. It is not surprising that nearly ninety percent of these students are from poor, disadvantaged families and attend urban schools (Oswald & Safran, 2003).

Students who do not finish high school will not only suffer from academic deficiencies, but they will also experience economic hardship of unemployment or underemployment as well (Hartley, Bailey, & Stone, 2002). Without alternative intervention, many of these students' needs will go unattended and they, too, will become

a dropout statistic. To understand adequately the myriad of problems faced by alternative students and assess the programs that serve them, one must first address the factors associated with school failure: poor school attendance, severe behavior problems, low self-esteem, poor self-concept, drug abuse, low parent involvement, truancy, teenage parenthood, and involvement in crime. These factors, some of which are beyond students' control, directly impact whether or not they will finish high school (Morley, 1991).

By reviewing available research, educators must take a closer look at alternative education and focus their efforts on eliminating ineffective programs that do not boost student success. Examples of such programs include those that are formed by administrators without staff input; those that are too short; those that are punitive; those that do not offer counseling/social services; and those that require students to adhere to traditional regulations and operating procedures (Morley, 1991). This research aims to determine those factors that are related to alternative students' success in public schools.

### Significance of the Study

There is an alarming call for school systems around the county, especially inner-city schools, to change the traditional methodology for educating students. Pedagogies have transformed under many titles, reform models, being one of the latest; yet, there is a population of students who can benefit from a tailor-made program. The alarming drop out rate is just one indicator that not all students will learn from a traditional program.

This study was designed to discover information that might benefit the population of students who are being dismissed from a regular education program without favorable



options. School systems that are struggling from the lack of viable solutions for an alternative student will be able to ascertain a working model for that population of students. According to McCauley (1999), all students should be able to have the most effective opportunity to be successful in society because it is a necessity.

Given the information from the study, stakeholders will be able to rearrange alternative schools/programs to be productive and not punitive. Education should focus on the whole child and be experiential in nature. This is a progressive move towards education reform for alternative education programs. The staff of these types of programs would be required to encourage students to be more responsible for themselves, be positive, and have a strong interest in determining their educational goals.

There are numerous positive impacts this study might have for interested stakeholders seeking an effective alternative program. The study seeks to determine if students are more concerned with being rehabilitated versus re-entering the program due to being ill prepared. A program such as this will have less negative stigmas associated with having gone to an alternative program. It might lessen the drop-out rate and provide help in operating a beneficial non-traditional school/program.

### Research Questions

The intent of this study is to answer the following research questions based on the perceptions of administrators, teachers, and students:

1. Is there a relationship between principal leadership skills and alternative school student success?

2. Is there a relationship between curricular content and alternative school student success?
3. Is there a relationship between parental involvement and alternative school student success?
4. Is there a relationship between supportive services and alternative school student success?
5. How effective is the ABC alternative school (pseudonym) in meeting its stated goals?

### Summary

Students' behavior is a great factor for determining if students will matriculate through a traditional school versus a non-traditional school. The policies and procedures are put in place as such; not taking an in-depth look at the core of the problem for individual cases. Consequently, a number of students populate non-traditional schools just to find themselves with others who share common situations and not the best resolution, if any.

In the past twenty years, there has been an alarming amount of information regarding treating emotional and behavioral disorders of childhood (Aeby, 2001). Students, teachers, and administrators are primary sources for ascertaining information when analyzing the relationships of students' success rate.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There is a dire need to examine factors that directly affect the lives of students enrolled in alternative schools. Initially, within the past two decades school systems across the nation have focused their energy on serving students who are identified as at risk by creating evening programs, teenage parenting programs, open campuses, charter schools and other special programs for those students who have been expelled from the general school populations. Because of this vast increase of programs, it is imperative that research be conducted to determine which factors are effective in ensuring students' success.

Research on alternative school programs can help educators and other constituents understand the significance of the problem from an economic perspective. Alternative school intervention programs have come to the rescue of many at-risk students who have difficulty coping with traditional schools. In fact, alternative education has become so popular that the American Federation of Teachers has estimated that for the additional \$1750 spent on each alternative student, the public actually gains \$14,000 in student learning time that would have been lost had these students remained in the traditional school setting. Moreover, because of the significant contributions made by alternative programs, the public also saves annually per student approximately \$2,800 in reduced grade repetition, \$1,700 in reduced welfare costs, and \$1,500 in reduced prison costs.

The relationship between disruptive behavior and juvenile justice issues is clear: many of the precursors of delinquent behavior are school related (Gottfredson, Sealock, & Kroger, 1996). Although there are thousands of success stories that can be attributed to alternative school programs, school systems still have too many students who are placed at a disadvantage in achieving goals (Dunbar, 2002). Thus, it is the responsibility of educational researchers to determine ways to further decrease student failure by conducting research that capitalizes on past success and provides new directions for non-traditional, alternative education.

The review of literature is divided into two major sections. The first section highlights factors contributing to a productive alternative education program/school for non-conforming students as policies and procedures dictate. The second section provides effective models of alternative education programs/schools. The concluding section summarizes the review of literature.

### Factors Contributing to a Productive Non-Traditional Program/School

The perception of students has not been considered in developing new alternative programs. To adequately assess the effectiveness of alternative education programs, research must first focus on gathering the thoughts, ideas, and feelings of those who are affected the most—the students.

Four factors have been identified in examining effective alternative education programs/schools: (a) principal leadership skills/teacher commitment, (b) curricular content, (c) parental involvement, and (d) supportive services.

*Factor of Students' Success-Principal/Teacher*

Educational leaders have a vital role in more effectively working with students at risk by determining non-traditional ways to motivate students who are disengaged from their educational needs. Educational leaders must meet the incredibly complex challenges of managing a school for students that are in need of additional support due to various reasons. These principals are also faced with the same challenges as leaders of traditional educational settings. Unrelenting change, unending school reform, and high-stakes testing and accountability continue to increase the demands on principals. According to Blaydes and Booth (2002), principals can avoid burnout and survive stress by mastering what they coin the three R's of principalship. Resiliency, renewal, and reflection are vital to the success of leadership in a non-traditional school setting.

“Resiliency enables principals to lead with a clear vision and purpose despite adversity” (Gild, 2002, p. 2). Adversity in most non-traditional schools are often time very prevalent. An effective leader must be able to meet the unrealistic demands and expectations placed on them from the entire learning community. Being flexible enables principals to deal with crisis and problems that can occur on a daily basis. It is imperative that the principal have a steadfast vision and purpose in order to steer her school toward forward and successful movement. To ensure the success of an alternative school, a principal must be able to think, make decisions, solve problems, plan with the learning community, communicate effectively, facilitate change, and inspire students to achieve their greatest potential. Furthermore, to successfully lead an alternative school, principals must demonstrate an inflamed passion, sincere dedication, and professional ethics that

serve as strong models for others. Instructional leaders must serve as role models for their staff on a daily basis. It is important that the leader have personal relation skills that is respected and appreciated by the majority of his staff.

While being an instructional leader can be a lonely undertaking, it is essential to have a strong leadership team in place. Ultimately the success or failure of his school is his responsibility. Leaders of non-traditional schools must be a part of support network of other non-traditional setting principals. This collaborative effort is valuable because colleagues are sounding boards for dealing with similar issues and problems. Although it may be difficult to find time to participate in such sharing, it is most helpful. It can often serve to be the very thing that rejuvenates principals or initiates an idea that will save time or eradicate grief in the future. Personal contact with staff, students, and parents is essential to effective leadership. Having a genuine rapport with all those that make up the learning community is necessary. It is important to be accessible and visible to students, staff, parents and business partners. In times of adversity, an instructional leader must demonstrate resiliency by being consistent in her response using a positive leadership approach. He must live by the old adage, "...don't let the negativity of the job get you down."

Renewal is the second R discussed by Blaydes and Booth (2002). Effective leaders must find ways to renew their energy, spirit, and desire for the principalship. Re-igniting the passion for the job is essential in order to be able to perform at peak level. According to Blaydes and Booth, principals are in a very giving profession, and they cannot give what they do not have. It is impossible to be an inspirational leader on a

depleted spirit. To guard against burnout in a non-traditional setting, a leader will need to monitor gradual erosion of energy and spirit due to emotional exhaustion. Instructional leaders of alternative schools must be mindful to guard against chaos and stress. The job of a successful principal is unending and all consuming. Long hours are usually part of the territory and, due to the needs of an alternative school setting, are still never enough. Few can continue to work long hours forever. There is often a high price to pay for attempting to starting the day extremely early and ending extremely late on a regular basis. Leaders of alternative schools must purpose to create a workable plan to delegating duties, prioritizing tasks, and managing time wisely. Successful principals must not spend an enormous amount of time trying to create that which has already been established. This is why it is vital to have a network of fellow colleagues to share things. Sharing sample letters, forms, checklist, and the like is a timesaving strategy that is most helpful. Successful principals in any setting know how to create balance in their lives. They must have time for personal and family needs. They must have activities to sustain them such as, exercising, gardening, recreational reading, and time with family and friends. The principal must recognize the basic need for a private life, responsibility to family and the need for recreational and relaxing time away from work.

The third and final R is Reflection. An instructional leader must find time to reflect on decisions made and contemplate the results of actions taken in a given day. Research suggests blocking off a time to go into the office, shut the door, and spend a moment to reflect on the day's experience. Blaydes and Booth (2002) suggest that to

regain control of their lives, principals need built-in reflection time to evaluate, meditate, and contemplate.

Effective alternative school principals must find ways to incorporate a leadership style that will lend itself to their being able to exercise resiliency, renewal and reflection. These are essential skills to being a success at any level specifically in a non-traditional school setting. Study supports the ideology that leadership of a school directly influences the climate of the school, the morale of staff, and ultimately the achievement of students.

In an alternative school setting, principal turnover is high. This, however, can be negated when the learning community views the school and principal as a success. Studies on effective schools reveal a common thread that excellent alternative schools depend largely on the quality and skills of leadership. Once a principal can establish a healthy school climate, usually the level of success will improve.

Reynolds (2002) suggests provisions such as sabbatical leaves, peer-assisted leadership programs, and mentoring could serve to promote the personal and professional self-renewal and growth of school principals. Sabbatical leaves for school principals not only foster personal growth and self-renewal, but also can provide assistant principals and other administrators who are appointed as temporary replacements with the same effect. Mentoring and coaching have gained increased credibility in the field of management. Studies indicate that mentoring and coaching have gained increased credibility in the field of management as support and development strategies for administrators of all school settings to include alternative education. According to The Institute for Educational Leadership (2000), more recent leadership theories have focused



on the transformational leadership practices of formal school leaders. A number of studies have conceptualized the process of establishing partnerships in term of a life cycle, moving from a loose structure to a tighter and more formal structure. In an alternative setting, different leadership roles are needed at different stages of an academic year. Effective leaders must take advantage of partnerships. This process gradually transfers autonomy of leadership power from the hands of a small group of people to a wider group, which is more indicative to the make up of the learning community.

Through the years, teachers have been expected to take a class roster, issue out textbooks, and grade papers, and teach. At present, trends have changed since that era causing teachers to do more than just teach. The increase in combative and delinquent behaviors in school systems across the country has reached an overwhelming percentage. Numerous stakeholders through out the country thought more “zero tolerance” policies would be a cure-all for juvenile delinquents. Unfortunately, these punitive measures simply heighten the behavior reports (Oswald & Safran, 2003).

Positive behavior supports (PBS) is a collaborative team effort that includes teachers, administrators, and/or counseling and social services. The teacher plays a vital role in planning with all entities involved when devising a PBS folder for individual students. The idea is to be proactive and not reactive when addressing behavioral concerns (Salzer, 1999). The team investigates pertinent information such as discipline dispositions, suspensions, absenteeism, and the like. This is done before compiling a comprehensive behavioral plan.

Schools that incorporate treatment plans opposed to controlled plans have a higher success rate (Salzer, 1999). One key intervention used in a treatment school includes, yet is not limited to, training teachers in effective behavior modifications. These teachers are being kept informed with a myriad of typical and atypical behaviors that are practiced by non-traditional students.

Compensatory education (alternative methods to learning) can make the difference in alternative students' success. We emphasize that not all children learn the same way by including different learning styles in the curriculum and adopting various reform models for education. Now the focus is analyzing the behaviors of non-conforming students. Fortunately, studies have been published announcing how teachers can and will make the difference for at-risk students (Kiger, 2003). A nurturing teacher versus a non-nurturing teacher affects an at-risk student tremendously.

Professor Gamoran at the University of Wisconsin (Subotnik, 2003) spoke about quality instruction defined as plenty of respectful teacher-student interaction. Positive teacher-student interactions foster and stimulate students' appreciation and understanding for knowledge. Enthusiastic and well-prepared teachers are an essential element for eliminating negative behaviors in an alternative program. Teachers should provide high quality instruction and require high expectations from the students. Alternative education students generally find something comforting about pleasing their teacher and knowing the teacher is expecting them to perform. The caveat would be students must produce for the teacher in order to be successful in the alternative education setting.

The goal is to create a positive and less hostile individual in schools as well as in the communities. Therefore, it is imperative that teachers recognize the power and control they have on students.

### *Factor of Students' Success-Curricular*

Good teachers are the valuable factor when considering a child's quality education. Quality teaching is in high demand because of the declining conditions that exist in their schools. Teachers also lack the leadership skills which they need to develop on the college level.

The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NREL) indicated in a 2001 report that schools need to redesign for teaching and learning success; teacher preparation needs to be redesigned for current conditions and learning needs; professional development is needed for the remaining high-quality teachers. In order to help students prepare for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, all teachers must know their subject areas well, conceive how children learn, use modern technology effectively, and work closely with their colleagues (Fulton, 2003).

Through the years, researchers have studied and concluded on the most effective practices for enhancing learning. Studies in brain research, cognition, and the social sciences have landed concrete answers from four areas to contribute to more effective learning in schools and especially for students in non-traditional schools. The four areas categorized by Fulton are (a) learner-centered environments, (b) assessment-centered learning environments, (c) knowledge-centered learning environments, and (d) community-centered learning environments.

Learner-centered learning environments are in effect when the teacher attends to the knowledge, beliefs, background, and skills each child possesses. It addresses the style in which a child learns best and calculates the time it takes from learning to mastery. This concept promotes equity for the individual learner; meaning a student who does not learn at the pace of the norm will not be left out of the learning process. Individualized instruction is necessary for today's students (Fulton, 2003).

An Assessment-centered learning environment is in effect when assessments are given continuously and feedback is provided on what has been learned and what needs to be mastered. It also points out exactly where the obstacles have occurred for the individual learner. This process helps both teacher and student monitor the learning process. This enables additional strategies to be put into place and tried before time has expired. Formative and summative assessments are important; however, more emphasis placed on the formative is most important. This is where the teacher ascertains the learning style of the student and matches instruction accordingly.

Knowledge-centered learning is in effect when attention is given to what is being taught, how it is being taught, and what mastery looks like. Knowledge-centered environments are extended to the "sense-making" in an area of study. It helps students to continue to build and to apply their own critical thinking to their thoughts.

Community-centered learning is knowledge that is individually processed, yet socially supported. Learning is dependent on experiences, reflection, collaboration, sharing and building knowledge with peers, as well as with those who are experts on the topic of discussion. Fulton pointed out some real contenders for the learning process in

the community-centered learning environment, such as students spend about 14% of their time in school and 53% at home or in the community, not including sleep, where a third of that time is spent watching television. Increasing amount of time has been contributed to chatting on –line and surfing the web (Gregory, 2001). As a result, non-traditional schools today are challenged with finding ways to require students to engage in learning outside school hours to enhance what is learned in school.

### *Factor of Students' Success- Parental Involvement*

Parents not only have a legal obligation to ensure their child is going to school, they also have impacted them either positively or negatively through the years as they have matriculated through school. Parents are the first teacher(s) of their children and they play pivotal roles in setting students on an appropriate track for learning.

Unfortunately, across the United States there are an alarming number of students who have dropped out of school. Students dropping out of school or more succinctly not graduating from high-school has caused parents, school administrators, and politicians to take a hard look at this critical situation (Stanard, 2003). For many students who have dropped out of school, the decision was not a single event; but more so a process.

Parents usually detect this process first, if they are taking a stake in their child's behavior. When such negative behavior is detected, parents must be proactive and take initiatives to counter the situation with organized assistance. Counselors are in a position to offer parents help by giving them effective strategies to employ with students within the home. School counselors should be involved in school policy and procedure development in

order to not exacerbate problems linked to students who experience chronic truancy, absenteeism, then drop-out (Standard, 2003).

Problematic students' unwarranted behavior is generally answered through in-school suspension, out of school suspension, detention, and or expulsion. All, which are punitive measures usually do not speak to why the child committed a punishable act. These measures offer little incentive for students to come to school and attempt to be productive. However, these students coupled with responsible parents usually get through the ordeal. Stanard (2003) suggests collaborative efforts with counselors, parents, teachers, and school administrators should be implemented.

Presently emphasis is being placed on parental involvement for urban low socioeconomic school districts. There was a period in history when parents dropped or sent their child to school and left everything in the hands of teachers and the principals. Consequently, parents are now being encouraged to be more responsible in their child's educational process as reported by Schussler (2002).

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (2001) reported parent-students-relationships were greater in urban schools compared to suburban. This is an indication that parents are talking to their children and are becoming more involved. Parents are a primary source for their child and for the teacher when a connection needs to be made to make up parent-student-teacher relationships.

Generally, a framework of what is to be accomplished, as it involves, parents, should be established at the entering of a student into an alternative education program. A needs assessment and plan of action must be established so that the needs identified

can be appropriately addressed. This assessment and plan of action should be reviewed periodically with the parent, student, teacher, and in some cases with other resources that have been placed on the assessment or plan. When parents feel and see the need, it is more likely that teachers can count on them to do their part at home and at school.

Urban schools abroad are examining ways to develop productive and successful students. Since this is a unified concern, alternative schools have decided to explore the parent's involvement in order to determine its effectiveness in achieving improved academics and behavior.

According to various research findings, parental involvement continues to be the most significant element for increasing student achievement as well as positive behaviors (Gullatt's study as cited in Sachetta, 2001). When parents are actively involved, school administrators should empower them with participation in the decision making process of the alternative program. Parents should be fully engaged and informed about issues pertaining to their child's education.

One vehicle to attract parents into the schools is by having meaningful programs and workshops. When such was offered, parents quickly gravitated into the school and became an immediate partner. For instance, an urban school in Roxbury, Massachusetts attracted parents by offering (1) field trips, (2) Parent-Center within the school, (3) tutoring assistance by collegiate students, and (4) English as a Second Language (ESL) and General Education Development (GED) (Glass, 1995).

Parents in low socioeconomic school districts can be attracted/interested enough to make up a strong and committed parent group. Alternative education parents do want

equity and the best for their child regardless of what the press may print, media may air, or other ethnic groups may believe. However, there is a large number of alternative education parents who do not realize the positive impact they could make with their child if they get involved with the neighborhood school. Parents must not feel intimidated or be lead to believe that teachers and administrators can impart knowledge and social training without the parents' help.

Students in alternative education programs/school who do not receive the proper attention, affection, and academic support from parents have a tendency to produce negative behavior(s) in school. Children are impressionable, and who is better to serve them than their parents. If parents are not exerting quality time with their children; then right away the odds are placed against them. There are an alarming number of cases where a juvenile delinquent is asked why he/she is involved in such negative situations. Immediately he/she responds with, "Why are you worrying about it? My folks don't care!"

The need for more effective parental involvement in alternative education program/school is greater now than ever before. Required changes, undoubtedly, have brought demands for restructuring the traditional model of schooling. At the same time, the task of parenting has been presented with new challenges. Both parents and teachers have a stake in such a partnership.

There are profound studies supporting a correlation between parent involvement and student successes. Today's principals and teachers concluded that academic and



behavioral achievements rely vastly on support offered at home (Gregory, 2001). In some cases, parents have affected students' success single handedly.

#### *Factor of Students' Success-Supportive Services*

The problems of students attending an alternative education setting are vast, and solutions can be complex. It is imperative that educators identify students needing additional support as early as possible. Instructional leaders will need to employ the expertise of their support staff including counselors, school psychologists, social workers, and school resource officers. The support personnel should be able to train other faculty members in identifying the factors, which may lead to students being at-risk and needing additional support in the alternative school setting. In order to be of assistance to students in alternative educational settings, counselors and other support staff must have strategies for understanding how these children developed and the faulty goals they are pursuing. Alternative education can be a valuable component to the learning community when appropriate and skilled personnel are made available to the students. As educational professionals, we must make every effort to understand the child from physical, mental, emotional, and social perspectives.

School counselors and other educational social services must understand how the student develops his/her self-concept. Counselors must understand that children develop views about themselves by observing others whether from television, peers, community or home. According to Walsh-Cairo (2002), in alternative school settings, if counselors and other support staff can spend the time to understand how children formed their opinion of themselves, it will help them to understand why children become discouraged

and give up. We must do our best to understand the child's world instead of expecting them to adapt to ours. Schools cannot undo what has been done or not been done, but we can, through individual and group counseling sessions help encourage and support the at-risk student.

Alternative education can serve to benefit students whether they have been identified as at-risk from statistics or holistic approach. Counselors and support staff can implement early intervention at a non-traditional site. Counselors are able to determine how the interaction of family, personal, and academic factors contributes to putting a student at-risk. In addition to in-school resources such as school counselors, social workers, special education and remedial teachers, and school resource officers, community social service agencies can be employed to support at-risk students. Due to the intermingling of factors, it is imperative that the school utilizes a variety of resources in their intervention strategies.

Studies show that family factors, psychological health, personal factors, and academic factors determine the necessity of an alternative school setting for many students. A non-traditional site is able to address these areas effectively due to the small number of students, support staff, outside resources, and opportunity for swift follow-through and evaluation. According to Walsh-Cairo (2002), a positive self-concept is essential and basic to good mental health. Counselors will be able to address communication skills, relationship, and other social skills. Students will be able to participate in small group and individual sessions. These sessions will enable students to

explore, evaluate, and grow with the support of expert personnel. Counselors, in an alternative educational setting, will facilitate the following:

- Primary coping skills to prevent self-destructive behavior
- Self-esteem
- Communication skills
- Relationship, friendship, and social skills
- Positive failure
- The process of grief around loss
- Creating a support system
- Stress management
- Making decision and choices
- Finding meaning and purpose in life
- Spirituality/religion as a resource
- Gaining perspective through laughter
- Helping skills

The counseling department in an alternative school can provide exploration of teaching all the skills listed above.

### *Models of Alternative Education Programs/Schools*

There is a wealth of information on factors affecting the success rate of alternative school students. However, not all stakeholders agree on which factors are the most significant. Little (1999) conducted a case study of at-risk students attending an alternative high school and was given the opportunity to observe faculty and students an

average of two hours per week. He later conducted formal interviews fifty hours per week over a three-week period. Two administrators, one staff member, and four teachers were interviewed to determine which factors had the greatest influence on student success. Students were also interviewed to determine their perceptions of education and their decision to attend an alternative school. All responses were analyzed, and it was found that students who were successful in alternative schools displayed qualities, personal attitudes, and behaviors that allowed for successful interaction with staff members. Resilient students also developed an internal locus, which enabled them to have direct control over the terms of their success. Additionally, it was discovered that school structure fostered resiliency by promoting a sense of belonging, motivating students to positively interact with staff members, and setting high expectations. Research findings also revealed that the human element in the students' lives had a significant impact on their success.

Barton (1998) also investigated the success of alternative school students, but her study focused specifically on the State of Washington. This descriptive and exploratory research reviewed staff and student perceptions of what makes students feel successful at secondary alternative schools. The premise of the study was that effective alternative schools were able to provide alternative school students with a sound educational experience while concurrently addressing their social and emotional needs. A statewide survey, telephone interviews, and site visits were methods to collect data. Findings of the study revealed that school size, strong teacher-student interactions, flexible curriculum formats, an open and flexible environment, parent involvement, instructional delivery,

and instructional leadership all had positive impacts on student success. Negative factors related to student success included poor attendance, slow response from outside agencies, drug and alcohol issues, inadequate personnel, lack of discipline, school size, and lack of parental support.

In a study intended to explore the perspectives of urban high school students who were former students of alternative schools, Coggins (2003) focused much of her attention on student resilience and risk. Teachers were asked to refer students who appeared to be succeeding in the traditional school setting. A qualitative research design using semi-structured interviews served as the methodology. Eleven former alternative high school students participated in the study and many of these students were identified by special education as having psychiatric problems. Nevertheless, they all successfully transitioned out of their respective alternative settings. Research findings indicated that the opportunities they received at alternative schools were pivotal. Factors related to developing good work habits, having multiple interests, improving their relationships with their peers and families, and improving their self-efficacy each played a key role in becoming successful in school.

Hall (2000) studied student perceptions of the components of alternative schools and their impact on their success rate. The study examined factors such as school organization and structure, curriculum and instruction, and schools climate. Key findings were that alternative school students, overall, viewed organization and structure, curriculum and instruction, and school climate as areas that positively affected their lives. Female alternative school students, however, had a more positive perception of

curriculum and instruction than their male counterparts did. Minority and Caucasian alternative school students had similar perceptions of all three of the aforementioned categories. The researcher recommended further study of alternative school education to meet the diverse needs of at-risk students.

Similarly, McCauley (1999) examined the relationship of organizational culture, school structure and curriculum to school membership and educational engagement as perceived by alternative high school students. All findings indicated a strong correlation of organizational culture, school structure, and curriculum to school membership and educational engagement. Students reported that a supported environment is essential to their success.

Lehr's (1999) study focused on factors that differentiated high school students who dropped out of school from those who persisted. The research incorporated an examination of alterable and unalterable factors related to dropout including perceptions of school climate, attitude towards school, stress level, and external circumstances. Some of the students who participated in the study had learning disabilities and emotional-behavioral problems. Contrary to widespread belief, students with exceptionalities were more likely to persist in school. Additionally, the interviews revealed that factors that directly influenced the success rate of these students included a supportive educational environment, individual assistance given when needed, and the level of respect students received from administrators, teachers, and other staff members.

Many students who are unsuccessful in alternative schools cite specific reasons for their failure. Some of their reasons are within the control of the school, while others,

although non-academic, adversely affect their performance. In a study conducted by Schussler (2002), it was found that society's understanding of factors affecting the success rate of alternative school students is crucial if we are to design an effective alternative school that results in success for all students. Schussler's study took place in a public, alternative school called Middle College, specifically designed for students who were at-risk for dropping out of school. Data were collected in the Spring 2001 semester and included classroom observations and student interviews. Data analysis was ongoing throughout the study using the constant-comparative method. The findings revealed that a learning environment that is caring, academically focused, flexible, and values-oriented is important to student success. In addition, Schussler found that the importance of opportunities to succeed and respect for all students resulted in students' positive attitudes toward their school.

Worrell (2002) asserted that alternative schools that have caring environments and emphasized human values were likely to produce successful students. Worrell (2002) studied at-risk students in a secondary alternative school program and focused much of his attention on alternative students' attitude toward themselves and their school environment. Grounded-theory methodology was used to structure the study. Results from the study support Maslow's theory that both physical and psychological needs fulfillment drive human decision and activity. Students reported that when their basic needs of safety and support were met, they were able to concentrate on self-actualization through learning. Worrell noted that educators should devote enormous attention to

understanding the human side of students and creating a warm and caring climate in order to structure alternative schools that work.

Loghry (2002) determined that the human side of education was crucial in the success of an Arizona charter school serving alternative students as well. Loghry's (2002) research project examined a unique charter school sponsored through the juvenile court system. The purpose of study was to investigate factors affecting at-risk students ability to attain high school credit towards their diploma. Data were collected through a survey consisting of demographic information and interviews with students attending the charter school. Public records were also used as a source of information. Research findings revealed that caring faculty members and staff, computerized instruction in the academic program, elective courses offered by the school, and court mandated attendance contributed significantly to student success rate.

There is no doubt that teachers have a direct impact on whether or not alternative school students are successful. Krueger (2001) noted that in the eyes of alternative school students, teachers set the tone for learning. The researcher sought to find specific characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors of teachers that students felt influenced their education. Twenty students in grades ninth through twelfth were interviewed, and as reported in other studies, the characteristics of friendly and caring were frequently cited by the subjects as admirable teacher qualities. Students felt that it was important to feel accepted and comfortable in the school environment. Additionally, students had positive perceptions of teachers who were helpful, patient, caring, and realistic about life.



According to the students interviewed, teachers who demonstrated the above characteristics were the reason they were successful.

Teachers in many alternative schools feel that specific components must be in place in order to produce successful students in alternative schools. The five school characteristics delineated include sound organization and management, a workable school improvement plan, special programs serving at-risk students, parent and community involvement, and prevention and intervention programs and services (Karnath, 2001). In a related study, Verney (2001) found that the type of parent involvement and the level of support and help from administrators and teachers contributed significantly to whether or not students graduated from high school. These findings concurred with those of Jarratt (2002) who conducted a phenomenological study of at-risk high school students' self attributes to their academic success or failures in an alternative education setting. Jarratt (2002) collected data through observations, field notes, theoretical memos and interviews. Analysis was conducted using the constant comparative method of data analysis. Three themes emerged from the data analysis:

1. Students began to take interest in their own education once they discovered teachers and administrators were sincerely interested in their achievement;
2. Students have an innate perception of their ability and it is very difficult to change that perception; and
3. Students who were experiencing academic success valued effort higher than ability.

The researcher discovered that the attributions of secondary students are set early in life and that they are significantly influenced by teacher-student relationships and teaching strategies. Once formed, these attributions directly influence the way students approach learning.

Meeting the needs of at-risk students has proven to be no easy task for many educational systems. Alternative school students, in particular, suffer from school failure caused by negative peer interaction, poverty, a lack of positive family involvement, a shortage of appropriate instructional programs to meet their individual needs, a lack of motivation, uncontrollable emotional problems, and the like. Many of the alternative programs currently in place label students as failures. As a result, students begin to see themselves as failures and are forced to drop out of school before reaching the twelfth grade. Current alternative schools should become equal in terms of resources and services in order to provide greater opportunities for student success. Punitive programs as well as those that stigmatize students should be terminated in order that no child is left behind (Fleming, 2002).

Hamm (1999) also argued that punitive programs do not help alternative students to be successful. After studying 30 alternative schools in the State of Texas, Hamm concluded that good alternative schools are tightly structured, caring, and high in behavior and academic expectations. Moreover, the support given to students by the administration and faculty encourages them to do their best in school. Hence, the climate is not cold and punitive in nature.

A more detailed review of alternative schools serving Latino youth reveals that punitive, restrictive environments often discourage them from succeeding as well. Rosenberger (2001) examined multiple factors that may account for the high school dropout rate among Latino youth in Arizona. This study was significant because in the past few decades, there has been growing concern over diversity and equity in public education. Data were obtained from a population of Latino students who enrolled in an alternative education program to attain a General Equivalence Diploma. The participants used a qualitative methodological approach to gain the subjective interpretations. Findings revealed that parents, the community, and school faculty and staff play a vital role in the educational success of Latino students. The study also found that these Latino students thrive in environment that are less restrictive, less punitive, and more caring.

In order for alternative schools to re-engage students and increase their chances of success, alternative education programs must consist of:

- a broad and comprehensive approach to teaching and curriculum development;
- teachers capable of demonstrating a variety of teaching styles that are effective in addressing the needs of non-traditional students;
- teachers who are knowledgeable of assessment procedures;
- leaders with a clear vision and who understand the limitations of the program;
- creativity and flexibility to respond to problems that arise in the school.

Alternative education today is much more than another different school or program. It has developed a different image that bridges the gap between education and therapy. To provide effective programs, alternative school educators must search the complexity of

both educational and psychological theory to find solutions to working with difficult students on a daily basis (Raywid, 1999).

### Summary

During this era of educational reform, research has shown that administrators, teachers, and other school staff play a major role in the success of alternative schools students. Current literature reveals that students feel comfortable at schools that appear to care about the academic, social, and personal lives of the populations they serve. Recent research findings also indicate that alternative school students develop a profound appreciation for teachers who utilize a variety of strategies and techniques to teach alternative school students. Without teachers and administrators who are knowledgeable of the human element of teaching and learning, alternative school students will likely experience failure at a very early age, and school systems will continue to struggle to find solutions to problems facing difficult students.

### CHAPTER III

#### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose of this study is to determine if there is a significant relationship between principal leadership skills, teacher expectations, curricular content, parental involvement, and supportive services as perceived by professional staff (teachers, administrators), and students. The dependent variable in this study is students' success in alternative education schools, and the independent variables are the principal's leadership skills, curricular content, teacher expectations, parental involvement, and counseling/social services. The pertinent terms and variables used in this study are defined. In addition, the null hypotheses, the study's limitations, and a summary of the chapter are included.

#### Definition of Variables and Terms

The following terms have been delineated for clarification in this research project.

*Administrator:* Public school employees above the classroom teacher, who have some influence on or knowledge of school operations or curriculum and instruction.

*Alternative School Program:* Any educational facility, center, or setting serving non-traditional k-12 students who were unsuccessful in a traditional educational environment.

*Alternative School Student:* A child, adolescent, or young adult who attends a non-traditional educational institution or who participates in an at-risk program designed for students who have difficulty functioning in a traditional educational setting.

*Community Involvement:* The participation of business, religious organizations, social groups, and political constituents in the social lives and education of alternative school students.

*Counseling/social services:* Are psychological, personal, physical, social and educational support provided by school counselors and social workers to alternative school students.

*Curricular Content:* Refers to all materials, methods, lessons, and strategies included in an alternative school's educational program.

*Parental Involvement:* The extent to which mothers, fathers, and extended adult family members participate in the lives and education of alternative school students.

*Principal Leadership Skills:* Refer to the strategies, talents, and behaviors consistently demonstrated by the school leader.

*Relationship:* Having a direct or indirect, positive or negative impact on student success.

*Student Performance:* The level of level of student achievement based on the traditional benchmarks; such as, standardized tests.

*Student Expectations:* The level of learning and commitment school personnel require of students.

*Student Success:* Refers to whether or not a student is prepared to return to the traditional school program; or whether or not a student graduates from high school.

*Teacher:* A classroom instructor, social worker, or counselor who works with or is familiar with alternative school programs in his/her school district.

*Teacher Commitment:* Refers to the dedication a teacher shows towards the teacher profession or the extent to which a teacher would go in order to support and serve students.

### Null Hypotheses

HO1: There is no significant relationship between principal leadership skills and the success of alternative school students as perceived by administrators, teachers, and students.

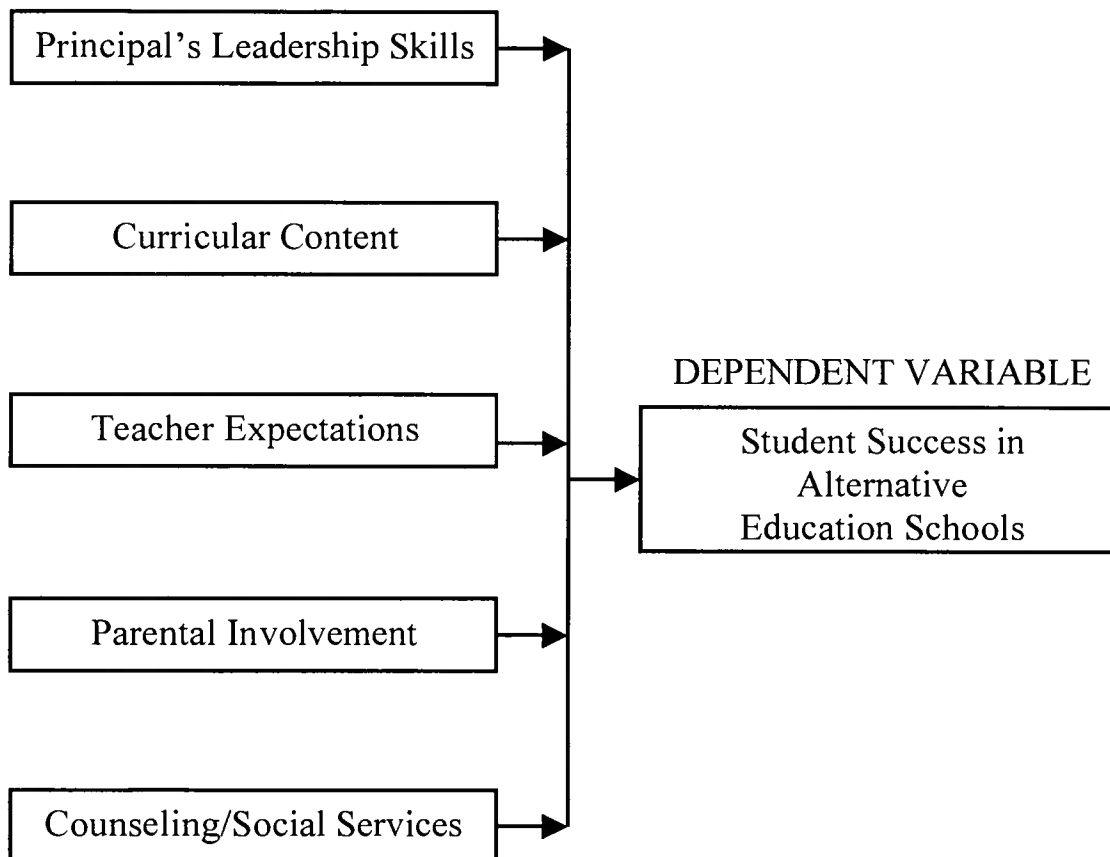
HO2: There is no significant relationship between curricular content and the success of alternative school students as perceived by administrators, teachers, and students.

HO3: There is no significant relationship between parental involvement and the success of alternative school students as perceived by administrators, teachers, and students.

HO4: There is no significant relationship between supportive services and the success of alternative school students as perceived by administrators, teachers, and students.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

## INDEPENDENT VARIABLES



*Figure 1.* Graphical Representation of Relationship Among Variables



### Scope and Limitations

This study consists of the following limitations:

1. Only the perceptions of urban school administrators, teachers, and students are used in this study although it is clearly understood that suburban and rural school participants play a vital role in alternative school education.
2. The geographic area is limited to a single school district, and findings cannot be extended to other areas.

### Summary

This chapter described the terminology used in this study in order to provide a clear understanding of what has been discussed. It also displayed a model of how the independent variables connected with the dependent variable.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine factors affecting the success rate of alternative school students as perceived by professional staff (teachers, administrators) and students. This chapter discusses specifically the research design, the setting, sampling procedures, working with human subjects, instrumentation, data collection procedures, administrative procedure, statistical applications, and delimitations. The chapter concludes with a summary.

#### Research Design

This study was designed to ascertain the relationship between selected factors (i.e., principal leadership skills, teacher expectations, curricular content, parental involvement, and supportive services) that relate to the success rate of alternative school students. The research was conducted using a non-experimental, descriptive/correlational design. In this study, success factors as perceived by professional staff (teachers, administrators) and students were treated as the dependent variable, while successful alternative school characteristics served as the independent variables. Demographic characteristics of the professional staff (teachers, administrators) and students were also

considered as independent variables. Since this study was correlational, the findings should not be used to draw conclusions of cause-effect relationships.

### Description of the Setting

The large, urban school district where this study takes place has an active enrollment of 54,000 students, attending a total of 89 schools: 63 elementary (grades K-5), two of which operate on a year-round calendar while 41 offer extended-day programs; 16 middle (grades 6-8); and 10 high (grades 9-12). The school system also supports two alternative schools for middle and/or high school students, two community schools, and an adult learning center.

Schools are organized into 10 vertical K-12 clusters, composed of one high school and its feeder elementary and middle schools. Each of the alternative schools relates to a high school, while community schools and adult learning center are extensions of regular high school programs.

### ABC (Pseudonym) Alternative School

The school district operates six alternative schools. These schools provide a learning environment to students experiencing difficulty in the regular school program. The alternative programs are designed to help students reach a level of academic achievement and social adjustment that will allow them to return to the regular school program. Student registration is contingent upon mainstream school recommendations.

The ABC Alternative School serves at-risk students from the school district. Individualized instruction, small class sizes, and various special programs are among the

tools used to reach students who have had difficulty functioning in the normal school environment. The school provides a learning environment for eleventh-grade and twelfth-grade students who, for whatever reason, have experienced a lack of success in a more traditional school setting.

### *Statement of Philosophy*

Non-traditional schools provide comprehensive, challenging programs characterized by high expectations, a rigorous academic program, a career education component, and individualized student support. These programs provide students with educational skills, job skills, social skills, and build self-esteem, self-motivation, and self-determination in order to succeed in a competitive, challenging environment.

### *Goals*

The goals of the non-traditional schools are as follows:

- To improve school attendance and punctuality.
- To develop positive attitudes that will reinforce self-esteem and coping skills for appropriate socialization.
- To enhance academic performance, vocational skills, and career readiness.
- To provide comprehensive social services to students.
- To provide opportunities for total community collaboration.

### *Curriculum*

The school's curriculum is aligned with the regular school curriculum. Students are provided with the standard courses aligned with the Georgia Quality Core Curriculum

as required by the state of Georgia. Students must show improvement academically, good attendance, and good conduct to be considered for reentry to a traditional school. Students may elect to remain until graduation in the supportive environment that the non-traditional school provides.

#### *Criteria for Exiting the Alternative Program*

Criteria for exiting the alternative school are as follows:

- Acceptable attendance record
- Improved academic performance
- Acceptable conduct and behavior

The program's objective is to provide alternative schooling for 10% of the high school population in a school year by developing and implementing quality, research-based alternative programs. ABC Alternative School's enrollment averages 80 students.

#### *Sampling Procedures*

The target populations were (a) all students enrolled in the ABC Alternative School during the 2003-2004 school year, and (b) all professional staff (teachers, administrators) employed at ABC Alternative School. The student population consisted of 40 students. The professional staff (teachers, administrators) was comprised of 1 principal, 1 social worker, 1 guidance counselor, and 6 teachers.

#### *Working with Human Subjects*

This study was conducted with permission from the school district's Department of Research, Planning and Accountability. Consent was obtained from the building

principal in order to include their staff and students in the study. Informed consent was also obtained by each participant (see Appendix A). Participation in the study was voluntary; all participants had the right to refuse participation at any time.

Participants were assured anonymity and confidentiality. No names were attached to the Alternative School Administrator Survey or Alternative School Student Survey. The data were stored in a locked drawer.

### Instrumentation

Three measures were used in gathering data for this study—the researcher-developed Alternative School Administrator and Alternative School Student Surveys and a formal interview with a program director. Each measure consisted of parallel questions (see Appendices B and C). The survey consists of 48 Likert-scaled items. Ratings were done on a five-point scale: 4 = Strongly Agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree, and 0 = Unknown (I do not know). The entire interview is included in Chapter V (see Appendix C for interview protocol).

### *Validity*

The content of the surveys was derived from a review of literature on alternative education and characteristics associated with successful alternative programs. According to Litwin (1995), face validity can be addressed by a cursory review of items by untrained judges; content validity requires a set of reviewers who have knowledge of the subject matter.

Survey development began with piloting of the Alternative School Administrator Survey and Alternative School Student Survey, using as respondents a panel of five school district teachers and administrators and an expert in research design. The expert panel rated on a scale of 1-5, the relevance of each item to what the surveys intended to measure.

A draft of the survey was also given to the researcher's dissertation committee for review. The researcher then administered a pilot version of the survey to 10 professional staff (teachers and administrators) and 10 students. The pilot professional staff and students were not included in the final sample population.

### *Reliability*

The internal consistency of the instrument was evaluated by computing a Cronbach coefficient alpha using results from the completed surveys. Alpha coefficients and correlations were computed using version 11.5 of SPSS for Windows.

As a consequence of the reliability analysis, several items (15, 18, 27, 33, 36, and 38) in the *Alternative School Student Survey* were deleted. Items 1, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 16, 19, 20, 21, 22, 25, 28, 40, 42, and 44 were deleted in the *Alternative School Administrator Survey*. Items which yielded (an  $r$  of .30) low correlations either with the subscale or with the total were deleted. The results of the reliability analysis are in Appendix B.

### Qualitative Instrumentation

According to Eisner (1998), the researcher becomes the instrument and is involved in observing, describing, and interpreting the existing setting(s). One common form of qualitative research is the semi-structured interview. In semi-structured interviews, the questions are a mix of structured predetermined questions that are flexibly worded. The format allows new ideas about a topic to emerge (Merriam, 1997).

An interview guide was used in the study (see Appendix C). To enhance the quality of the interviews (Newman & Benz, 1998), an external expert was asked to check the questions against the objectives of the study.

Stouthamer-Lober and Bok van Kammen (1995) contend that one of the principal steps in the preparation of a study is conducting a pretest interview because it is important to know before hand where the study one contemplates will be able to deliver the information one is seeking. A pretest interview allows the researcher to test the interview schedule and data collection methods. Additionally, the pretest interview enables the researcher to gain experience before the actual interview is conducted.

### Data Collection Procedures

It was the original plan of this researcher to conduct research at two alternative school sites. The administration of the second alternative school site changed during the 2003-2004 school year. The request to conduct any surveying or systematic questioning of the teachers and students was denied by the school administration.

During April 2003, a written request to conduct research in the school district was submitted to the school district's Department of Research, Planning and Accountability.



Following authorization to conduct research, the researcher contacted the administrators in the selected sites via mail requesting their permission to survey professional staff and students. Copies of the letters to principals and students are contained in Appendix D.

A package of materials was hand-delivered to the alternative school. The package included (a) a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study, (b) surveys, (c) directions for administration, and (d) addressed stamped return envelopes for students' and professional staff's responses. Informed consent forms were also enclosed.

### Administrative Procedures

Procedures for administering the survey were standardized to reduce the possibility of invalid responses. The primary approach for the collection of professional staff's surveys was to distribute and collect surveys at a regular faculty meeting. The principal requested the instructional staff to fill out the instrument at their faculty meeting. Teachers, in turn, were asked to administer the student survey to students in their classes. The principal collected the completed staff surveys and student surveys and mailed them to the researcher.

### Statistical Applications

As an initial step in data analysis, Cronbach's Alpha and internal consistency reliabilities were estimated for the Alternative School Administrator Survey and Alternative School Student Survey. There was evidence of strong internal consistency with all reliabilities of .90 or greater. Specifically, reliability alphas were .98 on the

Alternative School Administrator Survey and .97 on the Alternative School Student Survey.

Correlations were made between the subscale (or domain) scores of the Alternative School Survey and student success factors. Isaac and Michael (1971) describe ways of interpreting correlation coefficients in the following:

1. A correlation coefficient is a number indicating the degree of relationship between two variables. It measures to what extent variations in one variable are compared to variations in the other.
2. A correlation coefficient requires two sets of measurements utilizing the same groups of individuals, or matched pairs of individuals.  
Correlations cannot be computed on one person alone.
3. The practical significance of a correlation coefficient is making accurate predictions. The higher the correlation, the fewer errors in prediction.
4. The size of the correlation coefficient increases directly with the variability of the measurements. The more variable the measurements, the lower the correlation coefficient, other things being equal.
5. Since cause-and-effect relationships are always correlated, there is a strong tendency to reverse the process and infer cause-and-effect status between two or more variables based on an established correlation coefficient. Two variables simply may be correlated with a third variable. (p. 94)

The Pearson Product-Moment correlation is a measure of the degree of linear relationship between two variables, usually labeled X and Y. While with regression the emphasis is on predicting one variable from the other; with correlation, the emphasis is on the degree to which a linear model may describe the relationship between two variables (Stockburger, 1996). The correlation coefficient may take on any value between plus and minus one. The sign of the correlation (+, -) defines the direction of the relationship, either positive or negative. A positive correlation coefficient means that as the value of one variable increases, the value of the other variable increases; as one decreases, the other decreases. A negative correlation coefficient indicates that as one variable increases, the other decreases, and vice-versa.

Taking the absolute value of the correlation coefficient measures the strength of the relationship. A correlation coefficient of  $r = .60$  indicates a stronger degree of relationship than one of  $r = .50$ . Likewise, a correlation coefficient of  $r = -.60$  shows a greater degree of relationship than one of  $r = .50$ . Thus, a correlation coefficient of zero ( $r = 0.0$ ) indicates the absence of a linear relationship and correlation coefficients of  $r = +1.0$  and  $r = -1.0$  indicate a perfect linear relationship.

The data collected in this study were measured for statistical significance at the .05 level using the Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient. The data were analyzed using SPSS for Windows (Version 11.5).

Maykut and Morehouse's (1994) constant-comparative method of data analysis was utilized to begin the process of qualitative data analysis. All materials from the interviews were analyzed by (a) sorting and collapsing the data under topics that

represented the domains studied, (b) categorizing and organizing the data to form themes, (c) reviewing and categorizing again to find related data to the themes, (d) reviewing the data once more to determine any overlap or ambiguity, and (e) organizing the data in the form of propositions that summarize the salient themes and patterns. When necessary, the constant-comparative process was revisited. The qualitative data gather will be broken down into themes and sub-themes for discussion.

### Delimitations

This study was delimited to professional staff (teachers, administrators) and eleventh- and twelfth-grade students in the ABC Alternative School. Generalizations beyond these populations could not be made without further research.

### Summary

This chapter provided specific information on the research design, the setting, sampling procedures, working with human subjects, instrumentation, data collection procedures, administrative procedure, statistical applications, and delimitations. The research design was descriptive/correlational, and the research questions addressed the relationship between (a) principal leadership skills and alternative school student success, (b) teacher expectations and alternative school student success, (c) curricular content and alternative school student success, (d) parental involvement and alternative school student success, and (e) supportive services and alternative school student success. The population consisted of professional staff (teachers, administrators) and eleventh- and twelfth-grade students from ABC Alternative School. The instruments used were

Alternative School Administrator Survey and Alternative School Student Survey.

Pearson Product-Moment correlations and frequency distributions were used to analyze the data. The following chapter will focus on the presentation and analyses of the data.

## CHAPTER V

### ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

This chapter presents the results of the study which examined factors affecting the success rate of alternative school students as perceived by professional staff (teachers and principals) and students. Two surveys—Alternative School Administrator Survey and Alternative School Student Survey—were utilized to collect data on professional staff (teachers, administrators) and students, respectively. The return rate for all questionnaires is found in Table 1. This chapter, which examines and analyzes the data collected within the context of each hypothesis, is divided into four sections. These four sections contain presentations of descriptive data, tests of hypotheses, qualitative findings, and summary.

Table 1

*Return Rate of Questionnaires*

	Number mailed	Number completed	Percent completed
Professional staff	7	7	100.0
Students	75	40	53.3

### Descriptive Data

The description of the sample consists of the demographic variables on the professional staff (teachers, administrators) and students.

#### *Demographic Characteristics of Students*

As shown in Table 2, 13 (32.5%) students were female and 27 (67.5%) were males. The majority of students ( $n = 39$ , 97.5%) reported their ethnicity as African American, with 1 (2.5%) Caucasian participating in the study. Thirty-three (82.5%) students were 16-18 years of age, and 7 (17.5%) students were 19 years of age or older.

Table 2

#### *Demographic Characteristics of Students*

Variable	Number	Percent
Gender		
Female	13	32.5
Male	27	67.5
Total	40	100.0
Race/Ethnicity		
African American	39	97.5
Caucasian	1	2.5
Total	40	100.0

Table 2 (continued)

Variable	Number	Percent
Age		
16 – 18 years of age	33	83.5
19 years or older	7	17.5
Total	40	100.0

#### *Demographic Characteristics of Professional Staff*

The majority of the professional staff ( $n = 6$ , 85.7%) was female, with 1 male (14.3%) participating in the study. All (100%) professional staff members were African American. Two (28.6%) professional staff members reported 5-10 years of experience in alternative education; 2 (28.6%) professional staff members reported more than 20 years of experience in alternative education. The same percentage (28.6%) reported 16-20 years of experience in alternative education, while 1 (14.3%) staff member reported 11-15 years of experience in alternative education (see Table 3).



Table 3

*Demographic Characteristics of Professional Staff*

Variable	Number	Percent
Gender		
Female	6	85.7
Male	1	14.3
Total	7	100.0
Race/Ethnicity		
African American	7	100.0
Total	7	100.0
Years in alternative education		
5 – 10 years	2	28.6
11 – 15 years	1	14.3
16 – 20 years	2	28.6
More than 20 years	2	28.6
Work Site		
Alternative School	6	85.7
High School	1	14.3
Total	7	100.0

### *Descriptive Analysis of the Alternative School Survey*

Means and standard deviations for calculated for six domains (subscales) of the Alternative School Survey. The Community Involvement subscale, however, was not used in this research. The highest mean was for Principal Leadership Skills at 4.37 ( $SD = .85$ ). The lowest mean was for Supportive Services at 3.89 ( $SD = .93$ ) (see Table 4).

Table 4

#### *Descriptive Statistics of the Alternative School Survey (N = 47)*

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Principal leadership skills	1.00	5.00	4.35	.87
Curricular content	1.75	5.00	4.03	.80
Parental involvement	1.60	5.00	4.03	.91
Supportive services	1.00	5.00	3.88	.93
Student Success	1.00	5.00	4.13	.93

### Tests of Hypotheses

The results of the analysis used to answer the research question and test its associated hypotheses are presented in this section. All decisions on the statistical significance of the findings were made using an alpha level of .05.

### *Research Question 1*

Is there a relationship between principal leadership skills and alternative school student success? Research Question 1 was addressed by testing the first null hypothesis.

HO1: There is no statistically significant relationship between principal leadership skills and alternative school student success as perceived by professional staff (teachers, administrators) and students.

Pearson correlations were computed in order to determine the relationship between student success factors and scores on the Alternative School Survey indicating principal leadership skills. Table 5 displays correlations between student success factors and the principal leadership skills variable.

Table 5

#### *Intercorrelations Between Alternative School Survey Subscales*

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Principal leadership skills	—	.681**	.496**	.576**	.477**
2. Curricular content		—	.517**	.721**	.668**
3. Parental involvement			—	.442**	.473**
4. Supportive services				—	.640**
5. Student success factors					—

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As shown in Table 5, a moderate positive statistically significant correlation was found between student success factors and principal leadership skills ( $r = .477, p = .01$ ). Based on these findings, the null hypothesis of no significant relationship between principal leadership skills and student success was rejected.

### *Research Question 2*

Is there a relationship between curricular content and alternative school student success? Research Question 2 was addressed by testing the third null hypothesis.

HO2: There is no statistically significant relationship between curricular content and alternative school student success as perceived by professional staff (teachers, administrators) and students.

Pearson correlations were computed in order to determine the relationship between student success factors and scores on the Alternative School Survey indicating curricular content. Table 5 displays correlations between student success factors and the curricular content variable.

A moderate positive statistically significant correlation was found between student success factors and curricular content ( $r = .668, p < .001$ ). Based on these findings, the null hypothesis of no statistically significant relationship between curricular content and student success factors was rejected.

### *Research Question 3*

Is there a relationship between parental involvement and alternative school student success? Research Question 3 was answered by testing the fourth null hypothesis.

HO3: There is no statistically significant relationship between parental involvement and alternative school student success as perceived by professional staff (teachers, administrators) and students.

Pearson correlations were computed in order to determine the relationship between student success factors and scores on the Alternative School Survey indicating parental involvement. Table 5 shows correlations between student success factors and the parental involvement variable.

As shown in Table 5, a moderate positive statistically significant correlation was found between student success factors and parental involvement ( $r = .473, p = .001$ ). Based on these findings, the null hypothesis of no significant relationship between student success factors and parental involvement was rejected.

#### *Research Question 4*

Is there a relationship between supportive services and alternative school student success? Research Question 4 was addressed by testing the fourth null hypothesis.

HO4: There is no statistically significant relationship between supportive services and alternative school student success as perceived by professional staff (teachers, administrators) and students.

Pearson correlations were computed in order to determine the relationship between student success factors and scores on the Alternative School Survey indicating supportive services. Results of this hypothesis test are shown in Table 5.

As shown in Table 5, a moderate positive statistically significant correlation was found between student success factors and supportive services ( $r = .640, p < .001$ ).

Based on these findings, the null hypothesis of no significant relationship between supportive services and student success factors was rejected.

### Qualitative Findings

Qualitative results are offered which were obtained through a personal interview by examining the program director's perceptions of the effectiveness of ABC alternative school/program.

For the personal interview, the researcher was greeted by the receptionist and escorted to the director's office. The setting was quiet and more than adequate for the interview. After attending to preliminary, clerical, and essential introductory research requirements, the researcher explained the purpose of the interview, asked the director to read and sign the informed consent document, then started the interview using the protocol in Appendix C. The following is an account of the interview with the program director.

#### *Interview Question 1*

Can you please tell me about your professional background?

#### *Response to Question 1*

Mr. X has always been involved in a career that involved working with troubled teens. His approach to assisting troubled teens is to give them a fair chance and let them know you care. During the course of the years, he has done some unorthodox practices just to garner an opportunity to assist these students. Such as, visiting a student in his community (a place where "outsiders" would dare not to visit more or less welcomed), on

his neighborhood's basketball court. Mr. X would play a game of basketball just to get a conversation from a particular student.

*Interview Question 2*

How long have you been a director of an alternative education program?

*Response to Question 2*

Mr. X has been a director of an alternative education program for thirty-three years. He has been responsible for the ABC Alternative program 1970. The location of the school has changed three times in the city of Atlanta under his leadership.

*Interview Question 3*

What is the passing rate of students?

*Response to Question 3*

As told by the director, majority of the students now earn A's and B's. Few of them receives a C or less. He contributes this to the non-traditional set-up of the program by heavily relying on a computerized-based program to do most of the teaching. Unfortunately, final grades are not due, however, based on the teacher's report(s) no one is failing at this time nor does he expects failure at the end of the term. The students' schedules are the same as the traditional high schools and they must pass all classes in order to graduate, as well. The student's classes are referred to as modules.

*Interview Question 4*

What is the graduation rate?

*Response to Question 4*

According to Mr. X, this year the school had 97% graduation rate, last year it was 100%, and the year before it was 89%. Students received mostly vocational and certificate of completion of high school diplomas. Very few students have received a college track diploma-something Mr. X and his staff is diligently working on to change. Some students did not graduate in the spring of the year; because, of a failing score; however, they were successful in passing the Georgia High School Graduation Test during the summer school session. Interesting, as pointed out by the director, when the students are in summer school, they are not ostracized by a negative stigma when it comes to academics. Some students may even complete their course of study through a night school curriculum.

*Interview Question 5*

What is the dropout rate of the school?

*Response to Question 5*

The dropout rate is at 10% or less according to the director; because when a student stops coming to school, it is for a valid reason, in his opinion. He reports, students stop coming to school because they moved or society has forced him/her to work full-time and leave little time for school or they decided to join the military. A true dropout situation that he would label is when a student became pregnant and for whatever reason decided not to report to school any longer.

*Interview Question 6*

What criteria are used when accepting students into the program?



*Response to Question 6*

Mr. X assured me that all students were accepted; unless they enter the school with an unruly demeanor. He reminds the students that the day they enter the school should be the first day of their new found life. Personally, Mr. X does not concern himself with the student's past history or know why the student was dismissed from his/her former school. He is willing to give them an opportunity that is workable and favorable.

*Interview Question 7*

How many students receive free or reduced priced meals?

*Response to Question 7*

Often times, one would like to equate a student's socioeconomic status to their performance. Fortunately, Mr. X and his personnel have altered such negative stereotypes. One hundred percent of the students at ABC Alternative School are on either free or reduced lunch. Some of the students will indulge in the lunch that is provided daily. However, most of them take the liberty of their one-hour for lunch to leave campus and buy a meal. Mr. X explains, quite a number of them are already involved in the work force and are able to oblige themselves with lunch from a restaurant oppose to the school's brought in lunch.

*Interview Question 8*

What is the attendance rate for the past three years?

*Response to Question 8*

The attendance is critical in a program such as this. Essentially, if one is not present he/she cannot matriculate through the planned study and will find himself behind. Each of the six course classes are designed for fifty minutes which literally leaves no time for students to hang out of school or expect to make-up after school. For the past three years, ABC Alternative School received Pay for Performance recognition and their high attendance rate assisted in this achievement. Each year their attendance rate ranged between 97% to 98% rate.

*Interview Question 9*

Please describe a typical day at ABC Alternative School.

*Response to Question 9*

- First, the staff checks to see if all students reported to school prepared to work.  
They do this by checking to see if students are in need of the basic school supplies such as pencil/pen, paper, and a positive attitude.
- Next, a moderator, who is one of the students, provides an inspirational talk or reading.
- Then, the student body has an opportunity to elaborate on what has been said.
- Now the moderator continues by providing a synopsis of a contribution from an African American.
- Again, the student body is given an opportunity to respond to the presented information.

- Next, the students are involved in “Walk of Love.” This is where the student body is split and stationed on each side of the room. Then they walk toward each other and hug.
- After the “Walk of Love,” teachers are given an opportunity to give comments or voice concerns, then the director.
- Last, the moderator dismisses students for class.

*Interview Question 10*

Please explain the curriculum used in the non-traditional program.

*Response to Question 10*

The school uses Nova Net System, which is a computerized based system that teaches, provide tutorials, administer class assignments, and exams. Every subject the student has to take is done on the Nova Net System. This system allows for no flaws and is calculative. The students cannot pass to another area of the study unless they are successful in making a passing score on the specific subject. There is a printout available from the computer in which the classroom teachers compiles and keeps record. The teachers are also available for tutorial sessions. The classes have a small teacher student ratio so that the course can be most effective and in some instances teachers can provide one on one service.

*Interview Question 11*

How many students are retained, annually?

*Response to Question 11*

During Mr. X's tenure, 0% of students have been retained in the ABC Alternative School.

*Interview Question 12*

What are the expectations of teachers?

*Response to Question 12*

The director, special staff members, and teachers all have high expectations for the students and will not allow them to settle for failure. As a result, the students' grades reflect a success story by all students passing.

*Interview Question 13*

Tell me about any special recognitions or award ABC Alternative School has received.

*Response to Question 13*

Through the years, ABC Alternative School has received special recognitions from community leaders, city officials, as well as former State Education Superintendent, Linda Schrenko. ABC Alternative School was featured in Atlanta Journal Constitution in 1999 for the Pay for Performance award.

*Interview Question 14*

How many students are on grade-level?

*Response to Question 14*

Today, 100% of the students are on grade level and some exceed the levels. Mr. X reminds me that students are obligated to pass high school graduation exams and

they must take accredited courses in order to earn a diploma. Therefore, students are not allowed to perform in below level classes.

*Interview Question 15*

Are there any additional comments or aspects of your program you would like to mention?

*Response to Question 15*

Mr. X has no doubt he and his staff have put in place an anecdote to cure what could be an unsuccessful alternative school. He encourages others to take his lead and to come visit and actually see what is working. It is not a miracle or mystery to what can cause students to be successful in a non-traditional school.

Summary

The Pearson correlation revealed a positive linear relationship that demonstrated that increases in principal leadership skills, teacher expectations, curricular content, parental involvement, and supportive services produced increases in student success. The independent variables (aforementioned subscales) have a moderate correlation with each other, whereas they have a less moderate correlation with the dependent variable, student success.

A summary of the study's findings, as well as conclusions, implications, and recommendations, is found in Chapter VI.

## CHAPTER VI

### FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine if there was a significant relationship between principal leadership skill, curricular content, parental involvement, and supportive services as perceived by professional staff (teachers, administrators), and students. This summary includes a summation of the findings, conclusions, implications, and recommendations for on-going research.

The participants' responses were measured to determine if there were a significant relationship between the independent variables and dependent variable.

#### Findings

There were five research questions along with four related hypotheses and qualitative findings used in this study to examine significance in students' success rate as perceived by administrators, teachers, and alternative education students. These hypotheses were calculated from a Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), noting that the correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

#### *Research Question 1*

Is there a relationship between principal leadership skills and alternative school student success as perceived by administrators, teachers, and alternative school students?

One hypothesis was tested to answer this research question:

HO1: There is no statistically significant relationship between principal leadership skills and alternative school student success as perceived by administrators, teachers, and alternative education students.

This null hypothesis was rejected. To determine the relationship between student success factors and the principal leadership skills Pearson correlations were computed. Table 5, shows a score of  $r = .477$  indicating there is a moderate positive statistical significant correlation between student success factors and principal leadership skills.

#### *Research Question 2*

Is there a relationship between curricular content and alternative school student success as perceived by administrators, teachers, and alternative education students?

HO2: There is no statistically significant relationship between curricular content and alternative school student success factors as perceived by administrators, teachers, and alternative school students.

This null hypothesis was rejected. Pearson correlation was computed to determine the score and students success factor from the Alternative School Survey regarding curricular content. Table 5, shows there is a correlation between student success factors and curricular content.

Table 5 shows a moderate positive statistical score of  $r = .668$  indicating there is a correlation between curricular content and students success factors as perceived by administrators, teachers, and alternative education students.

*Research Question 3*

Is there a relationship between parental involvement and alternative school student success as perceived by administrators, teachers, and alternative education students?

HO3: There is no statistically significant relationship between parental involvement and alternative school student success factors as perceived by administrators, teachers, and alternative school students.

This null hypothesis was rejected. Pearson correlation was used to compute the relationship between parental involvement and student's success factors. Table 5, reflects a score of  $r = .473$  taken from the Alternative School Survey. A moderate positive score was established which resulted to the hypothesis being rejected.

*Research Question 4*

Is there a relationship between supportive services and alternative school student success as perceived by administrators, teachers, and alternative education students?

HO4: There is no statistically significant relationship between supportive services and alternative school student success factors as perceived by administrators, teachers, and alternative education students.

This null hypothesis was rejected. The Pearson correlations were computed to determine the relationship between supportive services taken from the Alternative Education Survey. Table 5, reflects a score of  $r = .640$  indicating a moderate positive



statistical significant between supportive services and students success factors perceived by administrators, teachers, and alternative education students.

The qualitative question posed on how effective is the ABC Alternative School (pseudonym) in meeting its stated goals were answered by way of an interview with the alternative school's director. All findings were favorable as they related to the questions in Appendix C. The technological curriculum used in the ABC Alternative School has proven to be most effective in teaching the students. Their success rate is contributed the design of the curriculum and the structure of the school day. See full interview in Chapter V.

### Conclusions

The results of this research concluded that students' success in an alternative school program or school hinges on the relationship of principal leadership skills, curricular content, parental involvement, and supportive services. This study reflected a positive moderate score consistently with the independent variables.

The Pearson correlates showed a moderate correlation with the survey's subscales and a less moderate correlation with the dependent variable. Curricular content variable had the most significant impact on factors contributing to alternative education students' success.

### Implications

The congruent findings in this study implied that there is validity in needing to redesign alternative schools/programs with the independent variables used in this study. The results of this study implied that curricular content is imperative in designing a

program for students in a non-traditional setting. As seen in the ABC school, technological instruction has been the most effective in teaching the students.

The moderate positive score for each variable gives reasons to do additional research. However, moderate positive scores also give credence for this information to be used, a model for successful alternative education schools/programs.

### Recommendations

The analysis of the data collected from this study provides the basis for the following recommendations:

1. It is recommended that principals' leadership skills should be motivational and encouraging for such a setting. A good leader should include the whole learning environment (teachers, students, parents, and the community).
2. Future studies should examine the curricular content adopted for alternative education schools/programs. A curricular that is inclusive and comprehensive could contribute to students being successful in a non-traditional environment.
3. This investigation showed how parents can be an asset to an alternative Student's learning abilities. When students enroll into an alternative program/school their parents should be made an intricate part of the student's planned curriculum.
4. Supportive services are vital for students in a non-traditional setting. Future research should delineate which supportive service is most advantageous in a non-traditional school/program.

5. The qualitative findings of this study should be used in training alternative education directors, special staff members, and teachers through professional staff development courses. The information given can provide a clearer understanding of the caliber of personnel needed to serve a non-traditional population.

## APPENDIX A

### Informed Consent Form

September 2003

Dear Parent:

I am currently a graduate student at Clark Atlanta University pursuing my doctorate degree in Educational Leadership. The purpose of my study is to determine factors affecting alternative schools students' success rate as perceived by administrators, teachers, and alternative school students.

Your help is needed to complete this study. Data collected in the study will be treated confidentially. Thus, your name or school will not be disclosed. However, the results will be submitted to the Department of Research, Planning, and Accountability in Atlanta Public Schools.

Your assistance and cooperation will be greatly appreciated. If you should have any questions, please feel free to contact Mr. B. Garrett at West End Academy. The phone number is 404-755-7754.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Angelisa H. Cummings  
Doctoral Student

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, \_\_\_\_\_ has permission to complete the aforementioned questionnaire.

\_\_\_\_\_ No, \_\_\_\_\_ should not complete the aforementioned questionnaire.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX B

### Reliability Analyses

#### Reliabilities: Coefficient Alpha

##### Alternative School Administrator Survey

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Principal Leadership	Curricular Content	Parental Involvement	Community Involvement	Student Success	Counseling/ Support Services	Total
.9119	.9134	.6811	.9584	.9524	.8487	.9805

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#### Reliabilities: Coefficient Alpha

##### Alternative School Student Survey

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Principal Leadership	Curricular Content	Parental Involvement	Community Involvement	Student Success	Counseling/ Support Services	Total
.9337	.7416	.919	.8590	.8846	.8462	.9650

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## APPENDIX C

### Interview Protocol

#### (Personal Interview)

1. Can you please tell me about your professional background?
2. How long have you been a director of an alternative education program?
3. What is the passing rate of students?
4. What is the graduation rate?
5. What is the dropout rate of the school?
6. What criteria are used when accepting students into the program?
7. How many students receive free or reduced priced meals?
8. What is the attendance rate for the past three years?
9. Please describe a typical day at ABC Alternative School.
10. Please explain the curriculum used in the non-traditional program.
11. How many students are retained, annually?
12. What are the expectations of teachers?
13. Tell me about any special recognitions or awards ABC Alternative School has received.
14. How many students are on grade-level?
15. Are there any additional comments or aspects of your program you would like mention?

## APPENDIX D

### Letter to Teachers and Administrators

Dear Teacher/Administrator:

I am currently a graduate student at Clark Atlanta University pursuing my doctoral degree in educational leadership. The purpose of the study is to determine factors affecting alternative school students' success rate as perceived by administrators, teachers, parents, and alternative school students.

Your help is needed to complete this study. Data collected in the study will be treated confidentially. Thus, your name or school will not be disclosed. Enclosed is the questionnaire you are being asked to complete. Please answer each item to the best of your knowledge.

Your assistance and cooperation will be greatly appreciated. Thank you in advance.

Sincerely,

Angelisa H. Cummings  
Doctoral student

## APPENDIX E

### Letter to Students

Dear Student:

I am a graduate student at Clark Atlanta University in the School of Education. Currently, I am working on a research project, “Factors Affecting Alternative School Students’ Success Rate as Perceived by Administrators, Teachers, and Alternative School Students,” and I need your valuable input. Please answer the items on the following questionnaire to the best of your ability.

If you have any questions regarding the definition or interpretation of certain words, I will gladly assist.

Thank you for your assistance and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Angelisa H. Cummings  
Doctoral student



## APPENDIX F

### Survey to Teachers and Administrators

#### ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL QUESTIONNAIRE

##### *Professional Staff*

The *Alternative School Questionnaire* is a survey of how you feel about various aspects of your school. Researchers have identified characteristics and processes, which contribute to the academic and personal success of students and families of alternative education programs. It is important to get an honest and accurate assessment of your impressions of the school to better understand what ought to be done to improve the conditions. By completing this questionnaire, you are contributing to the improvement of alternative education in your community.

The information gained from the questionnaire is anonymous. Your responses will be combined with those of other professional staffs. No individual information will be reported. The information you supply is confidential. For this reason, you should not put your name or other personal identification on the questionnaire. The *Alternative School Questionnaire* is voluntary, but your participation is very important.

##### *DIRECTIONS:*

Each of the following statements describes a particular aspect of your school. Read each statement carefully and decide to what extent you agree or disagree with the statement as it applies to your school. Then circle the number that best represents how you feel about each statement. When you have finished, please fill out the demographic section of the questionnaire.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unable to Access	
4	3	2	1	0	
1. An effective principal operates a successful school.	4	3	2	1	0
2. An effective principal is visible throughout the school.	4	3	2	1	0

## Appendix F (continued)

	Strongly Agree 4	Agree 3	Strongly Disagree 2	Disagree 1	Unable to Access 0
3. Principals who have good interpersonal/communication skills operate effective schools.				4	3 2 1 0
4. Principals should serve as role models for students, teachers, and the community.				4	3 2 1 0
5. Students respect strong principals.				4	3 2 1 0
6. A principal's leadership skills directly impact student success.				4	3 2 1 0
7. Students should be expected to achieve in alternative schools.				4	3 2 1 0
8. Alternative schools should maintain the same policies and policies and procedures as traditional schools.				4	3 2 1 0
9. Discipline in alternative schools should be handled the same way as discipline in traditional schools.				4	3 2 1 0
10. Students who fail to meet expectations in alternative schools should never be allowed to attend a traditional school.				4	3 2 1 0
11. Alternative school students' needs should be met on a case-by-case basis.				4	3 2 1 0
12. School expectations affect alternative school students' success.				4	3 2 1 0
13. The curriculum in alternative schools should have the same standards as those in traditional schools.				4	3 2 1 0
14. Classroom lessons should be modified in alternative schools.				4	3 2 1 0
15. All materials and equipment should be supplied for alternative school students.				4	3 2 1 0

## Appendix F (continued)

	Strongly Agree 4	Agree 3	Strongly Disagree 2	Disagree 1	Unable to Access 0
16. More curriculum resources should be provided for alternative schools.				4	3 2 1 0
17. Curriculum content in alternative schools should take into consideration the specific needs and aspirations of the student.				4	3 2 1 0
18. Curriculum content affects alternative school students' success				4	3 2 1 0
19. Teachers in alternative schools should be expected to work harder than those in traditional schools.				4	3 2 1 0
20. Teachers in alternative schools should be required to participate in after-school activities.				4	3 2 1 0
21. Teachers in alternative schools should be skilled in counseling and effective school discipline.				4	3 2 1 0
22. Alternative school teachers should be held accountable for student performance.				4	3 2 1 0
23. The educational program in alternative schools should be designed by teachers in collaboration with parents.				4	3 2 1 0
24. Teacher commitment affects alternative school students' success.				4	3 2 1 0
25. Parents should be required to participate in the education of their children attending alternative schools.				4	3 2 1 0
26. Parents should be responsible for student behavior in alternative schools.				4	3 2 1 0
27. Parents should be permitted to monitor student-teacher relationships in alternative schools.				4	3 2 1 0
28. Parents should be allowed to assist instructional staff in all aspects of the school.				4	3 2 1 0

## Appendix F (continued)

	Strongly Agree 4	Agree 3	Strongly Disagree 2	Disagree 1	Unable to Access 0
29. Parents should closely monitor students' progress and provide recommendations to school personnel.	4	3	2	1	0
30. Parental involvement affects alternative school students' success.	4	3	2	1	0
31. Church organizations should get involved in the education of alternative school students.	4	3	2	1	0
32. Community constituents should serve as role models for alternative school students.	4	3	2	1	0
33. Community leaders should volunteer their time to educating alternative school students.	4	3	2	1	0
34. Student tutorial services should be a major responsibility of the community.	4	3	2	1	0
35. The community should provide outside activities for alternative school students.	4	3	2	1	0
36. Community involvement affects students' success.	4	3	2	1	0
37. All alternative school students should be committed to following the same school procedures and policies as those in traditional schools.	4	3	2	1	0
38. All alternative school students should be required to participate in school activities.	4	3	2	1	0
39. All alternative school students should be required to sign a commitment letter.	4	3	2	1	0
40. Alternative school students on a consistent basis should demonstrate normal behavior.	4	3	2	1	0
41. All alternative school students should be required to uphold the law.	4	3	2	1	0

## Appendix F (continued)

	Strongly Agree 4	Agree 3	Strongly Disagree 2	Disagree 1	Unable to Access 0
42. Student commitment affects student success.	4	3	2	1	0
43. Counselors should be required to hold frequent sessions with alternative school students.	4	3	2	1	0
44. Counselors should provide vocational guidance for alternative school students.	4	3	2	1	0
45. Additional counselors should be assigned to alternative schools.	4	3	2	1	0
46. Counselors should involve themselves in the personal, vocational, and educational lives of alternative school students.	4	3	2	1	0
47. Alternative school counselors should be experienced in working with difficult students.	4	3	2	1	0
48. Counseling Services/Social Services affect alternative school students' success.	4	3	2	1	0
49. In rank order, indicate those factors that affect alternative school students' success. Provide 1st, 2nd, and 3rd rank only.					
_____ Principal Leadership Skills					
_____ School Expectations					
_____ Curriculum Content					
_____ Teacher Commitment					
_____ Parental Involvement					
_____ Community Involvement					
_____ Student Commitment					
_____ Counseling Services/Social Services					

## Appendix F (continued)

Please respond to the following items to the best of your knowledge.

1. Which of the following describes your professional rank?

<input type="checkbox"/> Principal	<input type="checkbox"/> Administrator
<input type="checkbox"/> Assistant Principal	<input type="checkbox"/> Assistant Administrator
<input type="checkbox"/> Supervisor	<input type="checkbox"/> Director
<input type="checkbox"/> Instructional Coordinator	<input type="checkbox"/> Executive Director
<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/> Dean
<input type="checkbox"/> Counselor	<input type="checkbox"/> Social Worker
<input type="checkbox"/> Other Instructional Personnel	

2. Indicate your worksite:

<input type="checkbox"/> Elementary School	<input type="checkbox"/> Alternative School
<input type="checkbox"/> Middle School	<input type="checkbox"/> Non-graded School
<input type="checkbox"/> Middle School	<input type="checkbox"/> Central Office
<input type="checkbox"/> Home-based Program	

3. Indicate your gender:

<input type="checkbox"/> Male	<input type="checkbox"/> Female
-------------------------------	---------------------------------

4. What is the best description of your racial/cultural background?

<input type="checkbox"/> Black/African American	<input type="checkbox"/> Caucasian/White
<input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic or Latino	<input type="checkbox"/> Asian
<input type="checkbox"/> Native American	<input type="checkbox"/> Other

5. How many years have you been either directly or indirectly involved in alternative school education?

<input type="checkbox"/> Less than one year	<input type="checkbox"/> 11-15 years
<input type="checkbox"/> 2-4 years	<input type="checkbox"/> 16-20 years
<input type="checkbox"/> 5-10 years	<input type="checkbox"/> More than 20 years

## APPENDIX G

### Survey to Students

#### ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL QUESTIONNAIRE

##### *Students*

The *Alternative School Questionnaire* is a survey of how you feel about various aspects of your school. Researchers have identified characteristics and processes, which contribute to the academic and personal success of students and families of alternative education programs. It is important to get an honest and accurate assessment of your impressions of the school to better understand what ought to be done to improve the conditions. By completing this questionnaire, you are contributing to the improvement of alternative education in your community.

The information gained from the questionnaire is anonymous. Your responses will be combined with those of other students. No individual information will be reported. The information you supply is confidential. For this reason, you should not put your name or other personal identification on the questionnaire. The *Alternative School Questionnaire* is voluntary, but your participation is very important.

##### *DIRECTIONS:*

Each of the following statements describes a particular aspect of your school. Read each statement carefully and decide to what extent you agree or disagree with the statement as it applies to your school. Then circle the number that best represents how you feel about each statement. When you have finished, please fill out the demographic section of the questionnaire.

Strongly Agree 4	Agree 3	Strongly Disagree 2	Disagree 1	Unable to Access 0	
<hr/>					
1.	My principal appears to be a strong leader.			4	3 2 1 0
2.	My principal is always visible in the building.			4	3 2 1 0
3.	My principal understands students and handles them like human beings.			4	3 2 1 0

## Appendix G (continued)

Strongly Agree 4	Agree 3	Strongly Disagree 2	Disagree 1	Unable to Access 0
4. My principal is a good role model.			4	3 2 1 0
5. My principal is respected by the students.			4	3 2 1 0
6. I feel that my school expects great things from me.			4	3 2 1 0
7. My teachers feel that I can be successful in life.			4	3 2 1 0
8. My teachers praise my work and encourage me to work harder.			4	3 2 1 0
9. My teachers expect me to do all my work.			4	3 2 1 0
10. My teachers set classroom rules and demand that I follow them.			4	3 2 1 0
11. I believe that my success is determined by the school's expectations of me.			4	3 2 1 0
12. My school's assignments are challenging.			4	3 2 1 0
13. My teachers explain assignments well.			4	3 2 1 0
14. My school motivates me to learn.			4	3 2 1 0
15. My school has all the materials and equipment I need to complete my assignments.			4	3 2 1 0
16. I find my assignments to be interesting and meaningful.			4	3 2 1 0
17. I believe that what I learn in school will determine my success.			4	3 2 1 0
18. My teacher appears to be a hard worker.			4	3 2 1 0
19. My teacher takes out time to full explain assignments.			4	3 2 1 0



## Appendix G (continued)

	Strongly Agree 4	Agree 3	Strongly Disagree 2	Disagree 1	Unable to Access 0
20. My teacher works with me on an individual basis.	4	3	2	1	0
21. My teacher helps me with my personal problems.	4	3	2	1	0
22. My teacher appears to love his (her) job.	4	3	2	1	0
23. I believe that my teacher's commitment to me determines my success.	4	3	2	1	0
24. My parent is actively involved in my education.	4	3	2	1	0
25. My parent attends school conferences and other school activities.	4	3	2	1	0
26. My parent encourages me to do my best in school.	4	3	2	1	0
27. My parent helps me to solve school and personal problems.	4	3	2	1	0
28. My parent asks me questions about my friends and teachers.	4	3	2	1	0
29. I believe that my parent's involvement determines my success.	4	3	2	1	0
30. My community is actively involved in my education.	4	3	2	1	0
31. My community offers tutorial programs that will help me with my schoolwork.	4	3	2	1	0
32. My church has role models with whom I can speak about school problems.	4	3	2	1	0
33. Community leaders often volunteer their services to my school.	4	3	2	1	0
34. My community has a recreational park or facility that offers after-school activities.	4	3	2	1	0

## Appendix G (continued)

Strongly Agree 4	Agree 3	Strongly Disagree 2	Disagree 1	Unable to Access 0
35.	I believe that a community that is involved in a student's life determines his (her) success.			4 3 2 1 0
36.	I follow all school policies.			4 3 2 1 0
37.	I try to make my teacher and principal proud of me.			4 3 2 1 0
38.	My school's reputation is important to me.			4 3 2 1 0
39.	I help with school activities when asked by my teachers and principal.			4 3 2 1 0
40.	I believe that my commitment to school helps guarantee my success.			4 3 2 1 0
41.	My counselor is available to speak with me about school and personal problems.			4 3 2 1 0
42.	My counselor and/or social worker provide regular grade level orientations.			4 3 2 1 0
43.	I feel comfortable speaking with my counselor about my problems.			4 3 2 1 0
44.	My counselor encourages me to do my best in school.			4 3 2 1 0
45.	Rank in order 1, 2, and 3 (with one being the highest); please indicate those factors that play a key role in your school success. You should select your top three choices.			
_____	Principal leadership skills			
_____	Community involvement			
_____	School expectations			
_____	Student commitment			
_____	Curricular content			
_____	Counseling/social services			
_____	Parental involvement			
_____	Teacher commitment			

## Appendix G (continued)

Please respond to the following items:

46. Indicate the level of your school.

- ☐ Elementary School
- ☐ Middle School
- ☐ High School
- ☐ Non-graded School

47. Indicate your age group.

- ☐ 10 - 12 years old
- ☐ 13 - 15 years old
- ☐ 16 - 18 years old
- ☐ 19 years or older

48. Indicate your gender.

- ☐ Male ☐ Female

49. What is the best description of your racial/cultural background?

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black/African American | <input type="checkbox"/> Caucasian/White |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic or Latino     | <input type="checkbox"/> Asian           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Native American        | <input type="checkbox"/> Other           |

50. How long have you been enrolled in an alternative school?

- ☐ Less than one year
- ☐ Between one and two years
- ☐ Between two and three years
- ☐ Between three and four years
- ☐ More than four years

## Appendix G (continued)

51. Which of the following best describes your feelings about the school?

- ☐ I enjoy school very much.
- ☐ I sometimes enjoy school.
- ☐ I dislike school.
- ☐ I sometimes dislike school.
- ☐ I have no real feelings about school and attend only because I have to.

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